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AUSTRIA-HUNGARY AND THE NEAR EAST.

BY BRITANNICUS.

IMPELLED as much by the pressure of Germany as by "manifest destiny" or by an exclusive regard for her own interests, Austria-Hungary has steadily made her weight felt in the tangled scheme of Balkan politics. The ultimate goal of her aspirations is to find herself planted at Salonica; nothing less than that will content the forward school of Viennese Imperialists. The occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was the first long step to that end, the first, and until recently, almost the last. For nearly thirty years a combination of difficulties has held Austria back from all schemes of overt adventure. The internal distractions of the Dual Monarchy, serious enough in themselves and liable to be indefinitely multiplied, if, as the result of an Austrian advance upon Macedonia, some millions of intractable Slavs were to be added to the polyglot chaos of the Empire; the pacific and cautious temperament of Francis Joseph; the fear of Russia, which, without moving a man or a gun herself, could pour the Servians and Montenegrins upon the Austrian flank; the certainty that the conquest of Macedonia would raise the question of Albania in its acutest form, embroil Austria with Italy, and jeopardize and not improbably disrupt the Triple Alliance; and the crowning need for economy in the Imperial finances—have all condemned Austria-Hungary to a policy of obligatory conservatism. To keep things as they are "till all be ripe and rotten" has been her consistent principle. Thus every movement among the smaller Slav States towards economic or political union she has ruthlessly and instantaneously repressed, recognizing, and from her point of view quite rightly, that nothing could more imperil her present position and her future prospects than the growth of a formidable Slav kingdom in the Balkans, in league with Russia

and affiliated by ties of racial kinship and sentiment to many millions of her own subjects. Thus, too, she has made it a fixed object of her policy to keep Turkey weak and distracted, to foment discord in Macedonia and to hamper—it has been easily done—the European Concert in its work of reform.

It is only by keeping this dual objective in mind that the self-denying ordinance entered into in 1897 by Austria-Hungary and Russia can be appreciated. Momentarily deaf to the appeal of Pan-Slavism and absorbed in the Trans-Siberian railway, Russia was but too willing to conclude a compact that, without endangering her interests in the Balkans, would leave her a free hand in the Far East. Austria-Hungary, torn by internal dissensions and desiring nothing better than to see her mighty rival occupied on the Yellow Sea, was not less willing to meet Russia half-way. The two Powers agreed, accordingly, to maintain the *status quo* in the Balkans, to refrain from any schemes of conquest or aggression, and to respect the independence of the separate Balkan States. For the past ten years this agreement has been the basis of the Near Eastern situation. Up to last January it was observed on both sides with adequate fidelity. Russia, indeed, seemed for a time to have relinquished her traditional guardianship of the Balkan Slavs, and Austria, while busy as ever with sap and mine, abstained from any frontal attack on the *status quo*. When the misery of Macedonia became too poignant to remain any longer unheeded, the two Powers received from the Concert of Europe a mandate to carry out a common programme of "reform." Some good was undoubtedly effected, but the spectacle of Austria and Russia ministering to the needs of Turkey was not unlike that of two jealous and not overscrupulous heirs called in to prescribe for a dying man. Neither Power really desired or worked for genuine reform. Both were equally concerned in prolonging the disease. Such benefits as actually accrued to the Macedonians were the result of the pressure and insistence of Great Britain, France and Italy. When these latter Powers, at the beginning of the present year, raised and pressed home the crucial questions of reforming the Macedonian judiciary and improving the *gendarmerie*, the Concert of Europe flew to pieces and the ten-year-old compact between Austria and Russia was abruptly dissolved.

It was Baron von Aehrenthal, the Austro-Hungarian Minister

for Foreign Affairs, who by a single decisive stroke shattered at once the unity, such as it was, of the Great Powers and the Austro-Russian Agreement. Behind the backs of his colleagues in the European Concert he negotiated with the Sultan for the right to build a railway through the sanjak of Novi-Bazar. By placing himself under special and secret obligations to the Turkish Government, at a moment when the Concert of Europe was engaged in a last desperate effort to maintain itself and coerce the Sultan, Baron von Aehrenthal deliberately isolated Austria-Hungary, destroyed the confidence which alone offered a chance of united action, made continued co-operation with Russia impossible and effectually blocked the path to all further reform. It is of the first moment to ascertain, if possible, the motives that prompted his action. Why did Austria-Hungary last February suddenly assume an initiative that had long been foreign to her Balkan policy, throw over Russia and ostentatiously separate herself from the Concert of Europe? There are, I think, several reasons that account for her conduct. In the first place it was becoming clear that an autonomous Macedonia, under the protectorate of the Powers, was the ultimate and inevitable solution of the Macedonian question. An autonomous Macedonia could only in the end mean a Macedonia in which the Bulgarians held the upper hand; and a Macedonia in which the Bulgarians held the upper hand would amount, as was pointed out at the time, to "a racial wall of concrete across the route to Salonica, shutting off the Hapsburg monarchy from the port upon which her revived naval ambition is now unmistakably fixed." In the second place the concession extracted from the Sultan of a railway through Novi-Bazar represented an object the attainment of which was indispensable to Austrian expansion in the southeast. A glance at the map will show why. Novi-Bazar is at once a wedge driven between Servia and Montenegro and the easiest pathway of approach to Macedonia and Salonica. A railway through it, under Austrian control, would thus go far towards realizing two of the supreme aims of Viennese policy. It should still further divide the Serb race, and it would enormously facilitate the Austrian prospect of succeeding to Macedonia and of reaching the *Ægean*. It would achieve these two ends, moreover, without crossing Hungarian territory, and therefore without compromising that freedom of action which Austrian statesmen may con-

ceivably before long be obliged to assert even at the expense of their fellow subjects across the Leitha. By procuring, therefore, the right to link up the Bosnian railway system with the Turkish, Baron von Aehrenthal obtained for his country an asset of real strategic and political value. This, however, does not of itself explain why he set out to obtain it at the time and in the manner he did. Novi-Bazar is perhaps the most curious of the many curiosities of diplomacy. It was placed by the Congress of Berlin under the military occupation of Austria and the civil administration of Turkey, and among the rights assigned to Vienna was that of "having military and commercial roads" throughout the sanjak. None of his predecessors had thought of giving any practical application to these words in Article 25 of the Treaty of Berlin. Why, then, should Baron von Aehrenthal? What were the circumstances that induced him in February to resurrect an almost forgotten privilege and make it the basis for negotiating a railway concession?

The new influences that inspire and justify the new policy and the new assertive spirit are partly political and partly personal. Among the former I would give the first place to the reflex action of the introduction of universal suffrage. In a country so composite as Austria it was a venture of obvious and peculiar hazard, but it has abundantly succeeded. For the time being, it has flattened out racial jealousies and restored to political health and confidence a State that, but a few years ago, showed every symptom of creeping paralysis. Within the last thirty months there has been visible a startling accession of national strength and a pervasive concentration on the work of practical social reform. For the first time in three decades Austria finds herself no longer convulsed by racial feuds, no longer in the throes on interminable Parliamentary crises, but a harmonious, smooth-running State, capable of sustained and concerted action. Hungary, on the other hand, which has preyed incessantly on Austrian distractions and impotence, demanding fresh fiscal concessions and asserting her right to what was little less than military and economic independence, now finds herself embarrassed and at a disadvantage. The Magyars detest, and will do all they can to prevent, the introduction of any genuine scheme of universal suffrage into their half of the realm. They are acutely aware that it spells the doom of their racial and political ascendancy, and of the

social and commercial privileges that go with it. To Hungary the mere prospect of universal suffrage has brought infinite perplexity; to Austria its actual realization has brought an unwonted sense of union and stability. But the resurrection of Austria carries with it other than domestic consequences. A writer in the November number of the "Fortnightly Review" justly observes that the courses of internal and foreign affairs are more or less connected in every country, but nowhere so intimately as in the Dual Monarchy. An Austria racked by civil strife at home was an Austria incapable of strong action abroad. An Austria tranquil, hopeful and self-possessed is an Austria with both the desire and the ability to make herself felt abroad. The initiative which she has taken upon herself in the Balkans derives the impulse which makes it at once so formidable and so interesting from the happy change which has transformed her internal situation. Nor, as it happens, could she have timed her resurrection at a moment more auspicious for a policy of positive action. She worked her way from a seemingly hopeless malady to convalescence, and from convalescence to buoyant and tingling life, precisely at the moment when her great rival, Russia, was reeling through disasters abroad and revolution at home. While Austria was gathering strength and assurance, Russia was passing through a crisis that for many years to come must weaken, if not paralyze, her moral and material energy. Just when Vienna, after nearly half a century of passivity, felt stirred to self-assertion and expansion, St. Petersburg was grappling perforce with the wholly opposite problems of "peace, retrenchment and reform."

But the renaissance of Austria, and the temporary disablement of Russia, are not the only factors that have operated upon the recent diplomacy of the Ballplatz. They are linked with and reinforced by two other factors of a more personal but not less potent character. Austria is unique in the possession of two "dark horses." The heir-apparent, the Archduke Ferdinand, is one; Baron von Aehrenthal is the other. Both are newcomers in the field of international affairs; both are believed to share much the same views of Austria's internal and external policies; both have given proof from time to time of a strong and decisive personality, and both are called to high, one of them to the highest, positions in the service of their country; yet to Europe at large, and to their own people in only a slightly less degree, both

are unknown, enigmatical figures whose future courses and actions at once defy and invite speculation. It is only two years since Baron von Aehrenthal succeeded Count Goluchowski. But the two years have sufficed to refute nearly every forecast of his probable policy that was current in 1906. It was commonly expected of him that he would make it his first object to seek a broader accommodation between the Dual Monarchy and Russia. He was believed to be a Russophil on grounds which, sound or otherwise, were, at any rate, plausible enough to have earned for him the suspicions of Berlin. It was surmised that one of the results of his accession would be a certain stiffening in Austria-Hungary's attitude towards her acquisitive ally and, as its inevitable counterpart, a movement towards such an understanding between Vienna and St. Petersburg as had been effected between Rome and Paris. Count Goluchowski, by the stark coercion of his methods in the matter of the Servo-Bulgarian customs union, had left Austrian policy in Southeastern Europe an object of violent distrust. Here, again, it was thought likely that Baron von Aehrenthal would modify his predecessor's programme, and that while Austria was engaged in experimenting with a democratic franchise, and while the Magyars were engrossed with holding their own both against Austria herself and against the insurgent peoples around them, the Dual Monarchy as a whole would abstain from any policy of adventure or repression in the Balkans. Every one of these expectations has been proved to be baseless, and Europe is now alive to the fact that a new, redoubtable and wholly mysterious personality has emerged upon the stage of international politics with every apparent qualification and intention of playing thereon a commanding rôle. A German-Bohemian aristocrat by descent, a diplomatist by profession, the friend, confidant and literary executor of Count Kalnoky—who was not only an excellent judge of men, but an ardent believer in Austrian expansion southwards—the husband of Countess Szechenyi and through her in direct touch with Magyar thought and feeling, in appearance rather a professor than a statesman, tall, bespectacled, parchment-hued, of a slow, methodical suavity of manner, monotonously precise and unrhctorical in his form of address, a master of reserves and blessed with the gift of avoiding notice—Baron von Aehrenthal has shown himself the first Austrian Foreign Minister since Andrassy who gives promise of carrying on the great

traditions of Kaunitz and Metternich. Twenty years as *attaché* and Ambassador at St. Petersburg, where he made himself invariably popular, have given him a knowledge of Russian statesmen, policy and conditions that is probably unrivalled by any other European; and the central clue to his actions as Foreign Minister is unquestionably to be found in his conviction that Muscovite power for many years to come may be treated as a negligible quantity, and that now is the golden hour for Austria to steal a march on her rival in the Balkans. Baron von Aehrenthal, moreover, has proved that he can execute a policy as well as frame it. Within the past two years he has separated Serbia and Bulgaria; he has breathed a new vigor into the Triple Alliance; he has, in effect, though not in words, denounced the Austro-Russian Agreement; the speech of last January in which he defended the Novi-Bazar concession revealed a vast and co-ordinated plan for building and expanding Austrian power in the Balkans on the bedrock of railway development; he has raised Austria from the position of Germany's satellite to one of leadership and independence; and within the last two months he has torn up the Treaty of Berlin by annexing Bosnia and Herzegovina.

What enormously adds to the significance of these achievements is the belief that Baron von Aehrenthal was selected for his present post by the heir-apparent, that he is the Archduke Ferdinand's right-hand man, and that the policies he has initiated are the policies to which Francis Joseph's successor will lend the full weight of Imperial support. This, I say, is the belief, but as even in Vienna itself you will hear twenty different versions from twenty equally well-informed observers of the Archduke's political views, character, ambitions and activities, it cannot be called a certainty. The balance of evidence and of probability, however, inclines decidedly to the opinion that the Archduke, to whom the Emperor is more and more surrendering the guidance of affairs, is the true inspirer as well as the enthusiastic backer of the new forward policy; and it is not inconceivable that he looks forward to uniting it with the realm of the Hapsburgs remodelled, and perhaps extended, on a Federal basis. We have seen, therefore, that long before the Turkish revolution many forces were at work urging Austria to assume a more vigorous and prominent part in Balkan politics, and that several months before the plans of the Young Turks were even suspected by

Europe the Ballplatz had furnished decisive proof that the days of Austria's subordination and inactivity were over and that a period of calculated aggressiveness had begun. On a sudden, however, it seemed as though the new policy might be wrecked before it was fairly launched. The Hamidian despotism disappeared in a day. The prospect of a strong, united Turkey and of a tranquillized Macedonia became an incredible reality. In Vienna and Berlin alike the developments were watched with something akin to consternation. Every proof that accumulated of the absolute downfall of the old régime, every sign that was forthcoming of the moderation and capacity of the Young Turks, was another death-blow to Austrian and German influence and to long-cherished, fast-maturing designs of commercial and political exploitation. Let it be said at once that a Turkey strong enough to stand alone is neither an Austrian nor a German interest, and that all the resources of the diplomacy of both Powers have been, and will continue to be, directed against its formation. Both Vienna and Berlin were quick to see that it was not Abdul Hamid alone whose power was gone, and that the advent of constitutionalism meant the collapse of the whole Austro-German scheme of cajolery, intrigue and browbeating for economic, political and territorial ends. It was clear even to duller eyes than those of Baron von Aehrenthal that a pacified Macedonia left little scope for the arts of the *agent provocateur*, and that a reorganized and regenerated Turkey, allied, as in the long run it infallibly would be, with the power of Bulgaria, would interpose a fatal barrier to any advance on Salonica. To humiliate the Young Turks, to foment reaction, if possible to bring their precarious régime clattering to the ground, became therefore at once a prime object of Austria's policy. Its achievement was not difficult. The authority and prestige of the Young Turks, it was confidently expected, would be irreparably damaged if the first result of their accession were to be the loss of portions of the Ottoman Empire. To instigate, applaud and second the declaration of Bulgarian independence and to proclaim the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina were the means that immediately suggested themselves.

Nobody denies the excellence of Austria's administration of the two provinces that were handed over to her by the Congress of Berlin. It has been a civilizing work of the first order, successful in almost everything that can be seen and tabulated, but

not successful in winning the affections of the people. Nobody, again, denies that the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while technically temporary, had, in fact, become permanent, and that the chances of their ever again passing back into Turkish hands had ceased to exist. Nor will it be contested that the demand for autonomy in the two provinces, long persisted in and greatly stimulated by the grant of universal suffrage in Austria-Hungary and by the unlooked-for triumph of constitutionalism in Turkey, had become at once most difficult to resist and yet impossible to grant, so long as any doubt remained as to whether they formed part of the Hapsburg or the Ottoman dominions. Nor, finally, is it open to dispute that during the past two or three years the ideal of Greater Serbia has been pressed with unwonted determination; that it is an ideal which profoundly moves some nine millions of people, two-thirds of whom are Austro-Hungarian subjects; that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where all the inhabitants are Serbs, though Serbs of different faiths, in Croatia, in Novi-Bazar, in Dalmatia, and in Serbia and Montenegro, the Serbs have been drawing together on a basis of mutual revolutionary agitation against Austrian and Magyar ascendancy; and that the nightmare of the statesmen of Vienna—the formation, namely, of a great Slav community on the southern flank of the realm of the Hapsburgs—was beginning to acquire a disturbing reality. All this is beyond question, and in judging Baron von Aehrenthal's action full allowance must be made for it. Especially must we remember that Bosnia and Herzegovina lie at the very centre of Serb distribution, and are therefore most susceptible to the recrudescence of Serb nationalism.

What do these considerations amount to? They amount, I think, to this: that the formal incorporation of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the Hapsburg dominions had become, or was fast becoming, quite apart from the Turkish revolution, a political necessity. My information is that it would not in any case have been long delayed, and that the upheaval in Constantinople merely hastened and altered the manner of its advent. But for the complications induced by that amazing event, it is more than probable that the annexation of the two provinces would have been amicably negotiated between Vienna and Constantinople, with every formality of deference to the other Powers that signed the Treaty of Berlin. The triumph of the Young Turks pre-

precipitated what had already become virtually inevitable, forced Baron von Aehrenthal's hand and provided him with an opportunity for striking simultaneously at the Serbs and the new rulers in Constantinople. He acted with masterly decision and comprehensiveness. By seconding Prince Ferdinand's proclamation of independence, he made it impossible for Bulgaria to join hands with the Serbs in resisting Austria's own violation of the Treaty of Berlin. By handing back Novi-Bazar to Turkey he achieved the semblance of compensation without any real sacrifice of Austrian interests. If the *coup* had to be executed one may, at least, be permitted the remark that it could not have been executed more adroitly. Its effects will be many and enduring. The tornado of passionate resentment that swept through Serbia and Montenegro when they beheld their supreme racial aspirations dashed to pieces, and the Greater Serbia of their dreams placed forever beyond all hope of realization may not—I believe will not—lead to war, but neither, on the other hand, will it pass away without accentuating every element of Austro-Russian antagonism. It may, indeed, prove in the end that the possibility of a Greater Serbia, so far from being wrecked or delayed, has been positively furthered; that representative institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina will exercise an irresistible attraction over the Southern Slavs and furnish them with a new centre of gravity; and that the Hapsburg sceptre will ultimately extend over a Federalized monarchy in which Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Dalmatia will form a component State. Some such calculations as this may have been working in the minds of Archduke Ferdinand and Baron von Aehrenthal. Some such premonition as this may account for the instinctive hesitation of the Magyars in applauding the annexation. That, however, is a matter for the future to settle in its own incalculable way. It is enough for the present that Austria by a single stroke should have outraged Slav sentiment both in Russia and the Balkans, should have torn up in her own interests a great international compact, should have estranged the confidence of Western Europe, and should have dealt the new régime in Turkey a staggering, it may be a fatal, blow. These and the annexation of the two provinces, and a new consciousness of capacity for the diplomatic initiative, are the outstanding results of her recent *coup*.

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